

Madrid court demands removal of International Brigades memorial

By Alejandro López
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The Superior Court of Justice of Madrid has passed a judicial decree ordering the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) to remove an International Brigades memorial placed on the campus. It must comply within two months.

The memorial, built in 2011 and paid for by public subscription, is a plaque formed by two steel plates—four meters high by 0.8 meters wide—on a concrete base. It has the three-pointed red star, symbol of the International Brigades, with the phrase “for the volunteers of the International Brigades” and a quote by the leader of the 1930’s Spanish Communist Party, Dolores Ibarruri, saying, “You are history; you are legend; you are an heroic example of solidarity and of the universality of democracy”.

Soon after it was placed in the UCM’s gardens, the monument was daubed with graffiti calling the volunteers “murderers”. Since then it has been repeatedly desecrated by fascist sympathisers.

The case for the memorial’s removal was first brought before an administrative court by pro-fascist lawyer Miguel García, who stated in an interview to the Francisco Franco National Foundation that he belongs to a group of lawyers who seek to “defend our common fatherland Spain and we seek to intervene in her defence.”

The administrative court declared the installation of the monument “null and void,” arguing that it was erected with “no respect whatsoever for urban procedure and without obtaining a building permit.”

UCM President José Carrillo and his predecessor Carlos Bezosa were accused of having assumed “a power that does not appertain to them by failing to communicate to the university organs the installation [of the memorial]”.

The UCM appealed the decision to the Superior

Court of Justice of Madrid and attempted to obtain protection of the monument on the grounds of “archaeological heritage” from the Madrid town hall, controlled by the ruling right-wing Popular Party (PP). The request was not answered and the Superior Court of Justice of Madrid accepted the decision of the administrative court that the university broke planning laws and had to remove the monument.

Carrillo has stated that the university will not remove the monument and that others, like that honouring the victims of the March 11, 2004 Al Qaeda attacks in Madrid, do not have a building permit.

The monument is only a short distance away from the 40-metre high Arch of Victory built under Francoism to celebrate the fascist victory. To honour the Spanish armed forces, the town hall of Madrid has also recently installed an anti-aircraft cannon that belonged to the Condor Legion. The legion was a Nazi air-unit sent to help Franco and was responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians due to terror bombings during the Civil War, including at Guernica.

The International Brigades played an important role in resisting fascism at the Ciudad Universitaria (University City), where UCM is located. However, the use of a quote from the Stalinist leader Dolores Ibarruri on the monument is an insult to the memory of the 35,000 volunteers who travelled to Spain from 53 countries.

Having decided to dedicate their lives to the defeat of fascism, many of the courageous volunteers were subjected to purges by the Stalinists. Soviet intelligence reports spoke of a “disease-carrying bacillus” among the International Brigades. Officers were shot by the secret police (the NKVD) for Trotskyism, soldiers were interrogated and imprisoned—all of them committed socialists and internationalists. French Comintern

leader André Marty, who was responsible for organising the International Brigades, admitted to having shot 500 International Brigadiers—one tenth of the total death toll among the volunteers.

In October 1938, two years after the deployment of the Brigades, the Republican government under Juan Negrín complied with the demand by the Non-Intervention Committee set up by the British and French government that they be withdrawn. The government claimed it would force Nazi Germany and Italy to pull out their troops, which had become indispensable for Franco. Hitler and Mussolini, of course, did not pull out their troops.

Once the revolutionary spirit was crushed, there could be no effective resistance to Franco, who came to power in April 1939.

The decision by the Superior Court of Justice to order the removal of the memorial has nothing to do with a building permit. The PP harboured many of Franco's collaborators and now numbers many of their offspring among its members and leadership. Along with revisionist historians, the military, the media and the Catholic Church, it is spearheading the rehabilitation of Franco and the legitimacy of the July 18, 1936 coup d'état that started the Civil War. In this process, it cannot tolerate anything that contradicts this version of history.

The PP has sought to undermine the Law of Historical Memory passed in 2007 by the previous Socialist Party (PSOE) government, which made limited criticisms of the crimes of the Franco regime and offered minimal help to the families of his victims. It opposed the law for having breached the 1977 Law of Amnesty and the "Pact of Forgetting"—the reactionary agreement supported by the Communist Party and the PSOE designed to ensure the "peaceful transition" from Franco's rule and preserve the capitalist state. At a time when masses of workers were demanding a reckoning with Francoism, they were told to "forget and forgive."

In 2008, Judge Baltasar Garzón, who began an investigation into the Franco crimes, was subjected to an intense campaign of vilification that led to his prosecution and being barred from practising as a judge for 11 years.

Since the PP came to power in 2011, it has encouraged a rewriting of the history of the Spanish

Civil War and the Franco dictatorship that whitewashes Franco and the fascist terror. The PP has also passed a new education law, reminiscent of the Franco era, which reinstates religion as a subject and limits the teaching of the co-official languages (Catalan, Basque and Galician). It is also preparing to turn the clock back by reforming the abortion law passed by the PSOE in 2010.

In May, the PP government gave a diploma of honour to the Brotherhood of Combatants of the Blue Division, an organisation composed of veterans of the unit that served in the German Army on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. It has prohibited testimonies from being given at a teleconference with Argentinean Judge María Servini, who has invoked principles of "universal justice" to begin an investigation of Franco's crimes.

At a time when Spain is in a profound economic crisis, with mass unemployment and wages and working conditions deteriorating rapidly, the vehemence with which the PP defends Francoism is a warning that the ruling elite will use the same methods it used in 1936 against the working class.

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